

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** The Bettie E. Williams House  
**OWNER:** Mr. Matthew B. Cox  
**APPLICANT:** Mr. Matthew B. Cox  
**LOCATION:** 1910 Decatur - Old Sixth Ward Historic District  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** Feb-11-97

**AGENDA ITEM:** Va  
**MEETING DATE:** Mar-13-97  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 97L017  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Jan-16-97  
**HEARING DATE:** Mar-13-97

### SITE INFORMATION

Lot 4, Block 426 of the W. R. Baker Addition, NSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, being a 50' X 100' parcel, consisting of 5,000 square feet. The building on the site is a one-story, wood frame residence with a full width porch under the main roof.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The property is contained within the boundary of the Old Sixth Ward Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Originally part of the First Ward until 1876, the district today has the largest concentration of Victorian-era buildings in Houston. The area maintains the feeling of a modest, self-contained neighborhood with its predominantly small 19th-century, one-story cottages, two-story Victorian-era homes, and some early 20th-century bungalow style buildings. The neighborhood also contains fire stations, churches, corner stores, and a school. The original boundaries of the Old Sixth Ward extended further south to Buffalo Bayou and streets including Nelson, Richmond, and Bow were platted for houses which were destroyed or moved when Memorial Drive was constructed.

The building at 1910 Decatur Street is a one-story, wood frame cottage with gable end roof. The style of the building is Greek Revival. The most prominent feature of the house includes a full width front porch with rectangular columns and stick balustrade. The porch is placed under the main roof. The property was in the ownership of W. R. Baker, whose name was given to the subdivision, when it was deeded on May 23, 1861 to H. P. Levy. The deed describes the sale as "deserted land and premises." Therefore, it may indicate that the house was in existence prior to 1861, since the deed referenced "premises" which most likely means improvements. Although the type of construction for this Greek Revival style home is mortise and tenon with wood peg, indicative of building practices that stopped being popular about 1845, the builder could have continued to use this type of construction or the building could have been relocated to the site prior to 1861. Another source is a birdseye map (circa 1866) housed at the Julia Ideson Library. It also verifies that improvements including a small side-gable building existed on the north side of the block in which 1910 Decatur currently stands. Another interesting fact that may help date the construction of the house (circa 1860-1866) is found on one of the shiplap boards in the parlor. Inscribed are two names, H. Hartman and J. K. Brooks. While no listing in the city directory exists for Brooks, there is a listing in the 1866, 1867 and 1868 city directory for Henry Hartman, whose occupation is listed as carpenter but no address is given. However, further research revealed that a William Hartman owned a sawmill on Buffalo Bayou just south of the present day Old Sixth Ward.

On June 5, 1867 a deed by Francis and Ellen Levy conveyed the property to William Woodall, who owned the site of the present day building at 1914 Decatur (built circa 1890), being the property immediately to the west of

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1910 Decatur. Again this deed refers to "improvements" thus indicating the existence of 1910 Decatur in 1867. However, Mr. Woodall's ownership ceased for some reason (foreclosure perhaps) as the property was again conveyed by the Levys on March 21, 1870 to James C. Foster, a realtor according to city directories. Foster conveyed the property the next day to Bettie E. Williams. It was probably during the ownership of Williams (circa 1885) that the L-shaped wing with its side porch under the roof was constructed on the north elevation of the original house. It was probably also at that time that the wood-sash windows were changed from multi-light (6/6) to 2/2 lights. Usually the name associated with a historic building is the one who was the first owner who actually resided in the house and not the name of the individual who had the house built and used it as rental property. Williams sold the property on March 17, 1890 to Matt Moreland. The home was occupied by a series of owners/renters until purchased and restored by the applicant in 1996.

### RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

There have been several structural changes and modifications since the original construction. However, the building was restored by the applicant in 1996 when the HAHC approved a certificate of appropriateness on January 18, 1996. The applicant restored the building in accordance with standards that maintained and returned the building to its 1885 period, including: repair and leveling of foundation using original brick for piers in original proportion and design; installation of wood lattice between piers around perimeter of house; restoration of the front porch to include removal of existing porch columns (both round classical and turned columns that had been used in prior remodelings); installation of tongue and groove decking, installation of six regionally characteristic tapered square wood posts (9" wide at top and 11 1/2" wide at base; installation of pilasters to match columns; installation of stick balustrade (consisting of square 2" sticks installed approximately three inches apart) and capped with beveled top railing; repairing eaves including fascia, soffit, cornice molding and frieze to match existing; removal of concrete steps and installation of wood entry steps which were flanked by stick balustrade (to match porch balustrade) attached to porch columns and flanked at bottom of steps on either side by two square newel posts; repair damaged horizontal lap siding, watertable, and porch apron to match original; repair damaged bead board on porch ceiling to match existing; demolition of inappropriate additions that were not original to the house on the north and east elevations; restoration of the porch on the east elevation with porch detailing to match front porch restoration; repair existing 2/2 windows (circa 1885 alteration when L-shaped wing was constructed on the north elevation) and replace broken glass; repair existing shutters to cover openings in the gable ends of the original house; replace roof with composition shingles; paint entire building

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION....:

#### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S D NA

S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;  |

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- ☐ ☐ ☒ (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- ☐ ☐ ☒ (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- ☐ ☐ ☒ (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- ☐ ☐ ☒ (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends designation of the Bettie E. Williams House as a landmark to the Planning Commission since the application complies with the criteria in the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

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THE BETTIE E. WILLIAMS HOUSE

SITE LOCATION MAP

1910 DECATUR STREET

NOT TO SCALE

